

Rise and Shine

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RISE AND SHINE

From yearlong student teaching opportunities to a cohort model for seniors, the education program finds ways to set education majors up for post-Dordt success.



Anna Christians has had a busy senior year. During the fall semester, she co-taught first grade at Sioux Center Christian School in the morning and took Dordt classes in the afternoon. She spent most evenings creating lesson plans, doing homework, and trying to keep some semblance of a social life.

As she started the spring semester and began working full days in her student teaching internship, she was thankful for that fall busyness.

“When I showed up at Sioux Center Christian after Christmas break, I knew my teacher and my class,” she says. “Because I was already teaching last semester, I felt like I could hit the ground running.”

Christians is participating in the professional development school (PDS) program, a year-long student teaching opportunity. From teaching her first lesson plan to experiencing how rambunctious students can be between Thanksgiving and Christmas break, the extra semester’s worth of teaching has given her valuable experience.

“I’ve been applying for jobs, and administrators have asked me questions about what I would do if a student behaved in a certain way,” says Christians. “I’ve been able to look at what I’ve encountered with PDS and have an example to pull from.”

PDS is just one of the ways Dordt education faculty set education majors up for post-Dordt success. Rather than taking a traditional approach to student teaching, education faculty have structured PDS and other student teaching opportunities in a way that makes student interns feel better supported by faculty. And the schools where students do their teaching

feel that they're benefiting from the collaboration.

FROM SINK OR SWIM TO RISE AND SHINE

The traditional student teaching model was akin to being thrown into the deep end of a swimming pool, says Director of Student Teaching Dr. Ed Starkenburg.

"It's what we used to call 'sink or swim,'" he says. "You're thrown into teaching and hope it works."

In the past, a senior education major student teaching in a fifth-grade classroom would show up to class the first week and observe as the lead teacher went through lesson plans, answered questions, and kept the class on track. During the second week, the teacher would step back, and the student teacher would take charge of the classroom. Sometimes they would take on one subject at a time, adding social studies, then mathematics, then science.



E. Starkenburg

"It is the opposite of slowly working with the student teacher to get them to the point of confidence," says Dr. Barb Hoekstra, an education professor and PDS co-director.

This approach can have long-term consequences if students have limited chances to put the skills they've learned in their first three years into practice in a classroom. Starkenburg says that, depending on who you listen to, the likelihood that a teacher will leave the profession within their first five years is between 30 and 50 percent.

"Some of the reasons people give are they weren't prepared well, and they didn't realize how much work teaching might be," says Starkenburg. "We believe that more experience—particularly an



"PDS has helped me to build relationships with the students in my class," says Anna Christians. "Once you have relationships with the kids, your teaching is going to go so much farther."

extended experience where they can see how the school year begins and ends—better prepares them for the profession and increases the likelihood they will stay."

So, Dordt's education faculty have shifted to a co-teaching model, both in the PDS

with students, sometimes individually teaching the whole class.

"What the research shows—what really convinced us to follow this model—is that co-teaching not only helps college students, it helps the K-12 students' achievement," says Starkenburg. "And the mentor teachers—the experienced teachers that students are paired with—say they learn through the process as well."

For Anna Christians and her mentor teacher, Reba Marra, the co-teaching model within PDS has worked well. Christians follows the school's first-grade curriculum to plan lessons and then goes through what she's planned with Marra. This semester, as a full-time student teacher, Christians splits some of the afternoon activities with Marra and teaches courses she wasn't around for

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program and in the more traditional one-semester student teaching experience. Through co-teaching, the student teacher works with a mentor teacher to plan, assess, and teach courses together, sometimes breaking the class into groups, sometimes working one-on-one

ED DEPT.

See page 29 for a graphic on how the education department has broadened its sphere of influence over the years.

last semester, including Bible.

“So today, my mentor teacher showed me what she would usually do with the students and then tasked me with planning the lessons. I’ll review my lessons with her and talk with her about questions I have.”

From there, Christians and Marra will collaborate to teach the class.

Although Christians relies heavily on her mentor teacher, she feels she has the right amount of independence to be able to grow as an educator.

The PDS program Christians is part of is fairly unique; in the state of Iowa, only one other college offers a similar experience. PDS is one of the reasons why students like Christians choose to attend Dordt. Starkenburg says PDS students are more likely to understand the profession and more likely to be successful first-year teachers.

“Our students continue to say, ‘Can we please have more experience?’ PDS gives them a full-year experience,” says Starkenburg. “They report feeling better prepared for the classroom, and principals who interview them say these students show more experience and have deeper insights.”

SUPPORTED FROM AFAR

Not all education majors are able to participate in the PDS program, however. For those whose schedules only allow them to student teach for one semester, the education department has incorporated some of the features of PDS into the semester program. When he first began working at Dordt 14 years ago, Starkenburg says many students taught across the country and around the world. A Dordt supervisor visited once or twice a semester to check on their progress.

“Students told us they missed having the support of a Dordt professor and not having peers to commiserate with and

Christians works alongside her mentor teacher to meet the diverse needs of her students. They find ways to celebrate, too—such as the 100th day of class.

feel support from,” he says.

So, the faculty decided to limit the non-local placements and, when students went to far-flung schools, they instituted a cohort model so that student teachers would have at least one fellow student teacher nearby. Currently there are cohorts in Chicago, Southern California, and a few international locations, with possibilities of growth in other places.

“In Southern California, we are working

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—Dr. Ed Starkenburg, education professor

with two schools, with two student-teachers in each school,” explains Starkenburg. “Dr. Pat Kornelis, our non-local supervisor, will make two or three trips to spend time with them.”

Katie Kooiman, a secondary education major studying English and Teaching

English as a Second Language, is participating in the Southern California cohort. She is currently in Redlands, California, at Arrowhead Christian Academy Upper School, teaching ESL from January until March and teaching American literature, language, and psychology classes from March until May.

“On the first day of student teaching, Dr. Kornelis emailed all of her non-local student teachers to let us know that she was there for us and was willing to answer any questions we have,” says Kooiman. “I know I can email any of my education professors and that they’ll give me support.”

Kooiman lives with Rachel Roerig, a senior elementary education major who is teaching at Arrowhead Christian Academy Lower School.

“I can’t imagine student teaching without her,” says Kooiman. “She has been able to relate to the joys and struggles of full-time teaching. Rachel is a great listener—she’s always willing to hear about my day and offer advice.”

From building relationships with students to being relaxed in the classroom, student teaching has been a growing experience for Kooiman.

JAMIN VER VELDE (99)



"I feel that I understand the amount of love teachers must have for their students," says Kooiman. "Most importantly, I've realized the amount of grace teachers must have with their students, colleagues, and themselves."

EXPERIENCE, EXPERIENCE, EXPERIENCE

It's the experience, of course, whether in a full year of PDS or one semester, that makes student teaching so valuable. In their education classes, majors learn how to craft lesson plans, glean content knowledge, and manage a classroom, but these concepts often don't make complete sense until students take on the role of teacher.

"In the classroom they get to plan the lesson, teach, and then reflect on what went well and what didn't," Starkenburg says. "They start to think like a teacher."

But even as education majors are teaching real students with needs, gifts, and challenges, they are still real students with real needs. Christians recalls how she felt when her elementary students were discouraged when something did not go as planned; she found this disheartening and wanted to help them.

"I thought, 'We need to work on developing a growth mindset—if we make mistakes, we can learn from them and grow,'" recalls Christians. So, she turned to her Dordt supervisor, Dr. Gwen Marra, for help. Marra suggested a book to read and talked Christians through some themes she might use to stimulate a growth mindset conversation.

"I did what she suggested, and it worked super well," says Christians.

Nurturing such relationships between Dordt supervisors and student teachers is intentional.

"There's a sense that the supervisors are on call—whenever students need us. They have our cell phone numbers and can reach us if there's a problem in the



"I really appreciate my professors. They are so willing to invest in the education majors and make sure that, when we're in class, we're engaged and learning," says Christians.

classroom," Hoekstra says.

Being on-call, creating community from afar, and providing students with as much experience as they can are all ways Dordt's education faculty are helping students feel set up for success once they graduate and start working in a classroom of their own.

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— Anna Christians, education major

"We hear from principals all the time that they want good teachers. We're committed to doing what we can to help our education majors be those good teachers," says Starkenburg.

For Christians, the added experience has paid off. In a recent job interview,

she was asked questions such as how would she deal with a misbehaving child or what she'd do if students weren't completing their classwork on time. Thanks to PDS, Christians was able to provide examples from her experience. The stories she told brought her responses to life and gave the administrators a sense of who she would be as a teacher.

Before the interview was over, Christians had been offered a teaching position.

"I know the PDS program was a huge reason they were confident to offer me a job," she says.

Christians is grateful for the experiences she's had at Dordt.

"The education department took me from a college freshman with dreams of becoming a teacher to a student teacher with a job secured for next year. I feel incredibly supported by the Dordt community."

SARAH MOSS ('10)